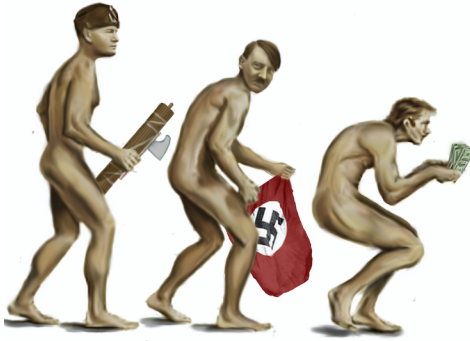


# The Decay of the State

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German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) perceived that certain fundamental structures—from language to justice—which had previously been enshrined by religious transcendence were by his time decaying through the democratizing impulses of the nineteenth century. He pondered the implications of this decay in its various manifestations, most significantly with respect to morality. Nietzsche viewed these structures not only as the means through which intersubjectivity takes place, shaping human relations and the communities that they make up, but also as the foundation of the human mind—the self and its interior world. This paper takes

as its starting point Nietzsche’s analysis of the decay of the state and explores the consequences of the dissolution of intersubjective structures in general on human communities and human consciousness.

Throughout Nietzsche’s body of work, from *On Truth and Lie in the Nonmoral Sense* to *On the Genealogy of Morality*, a narrative about language and community takes shape. Language provides a structure that allows individuals to communicate according to shared rules and forms, uniting them by this standard into a shared community but also establishing a hierarchy with respect to the rules and forms of the structure. Eventually, Nietzsche argues, this structure becomes associated with the transcendence of religion. Democracy, however, brings about “the *decay of the state*” by undermining this transcendence through the subjectivity and conflict of democratic politics.<sup>1</sup>

This transformation then unfolds in two stages: (1) the privatization of religious feeling wrought by democracy, which manifested first as twentieth-century totalitarianism and then as postwar pluralism, and (2) the privatization of state functions once the first stage led to sufficient dysfunction, which took the form of late twentieth-century neoliberalism. Nietzsche is subsequently torn as to the ultimate consequences of this privatization of structure. On the one hand, he sees the potential for self-conscious freedom, as sovereign individuals become masters of their own structures. On the other hand, he laments that the absence of structure might bring about the re-bestialization of man, the end of civilization, and the undoing of human consciousness.

Before understanding Nietzsche’s notion of the decay of the state, the ideas of the state, of the community, and of their sources must be explored. Maurizio Viroli recounts the history of political language from the ancient world’s idea of civil philosophy to post-Machiavelli theories of reason of state and the subsequent divorce between politics and what became an individual-centered moral philosophy. He begins with the Ciceronian notion of “a political man,” who rules “a community of men bound together by principles of justice” and who “must possess political virtues.”<sup>2</sup> The significance here resides in the necessity that a leader possesses virtue and in the idea that politics is

honorable and the science of justice. This political thinking becomes more pronounced in Plotinus, who says, “political virtues lead man toward likeness to God because they are principles of order and beauty and set bounds and measure to our desires and passions [...and] make man’s soul similar to the order and measure of the transcendent world.”<sup>3</sup> Here, Plotinus outlines two important ideas: first, that politics brings order and, second, that this order resembles the higher order of a transcendent being. St. Augustine similarly believed that “the political community must be well-ordered.”<sup>4</sup> Order becomes the crucial aim for politics, which makes its good practice a spiritual act. Viroli then adds that, according to Alain de Lille, political virtues are “inherently particularistic” because they pertain to a specific community and its customs.<sup>5</sup> An image now emerges of this conception of politics: a ruler, possessing political virtues—among which “justice deserves priority” because, according to Baldus of Ubaldis, it is “most necessary to rule a *civitas*”—brings a community together under a united sense of justice and according to the specific customs and traditions of that community, and this process creates an order in the community that brings it closer to the higher order of transcendent being.<sup>6,7</sup>

Viroli then notes the importance of language in these civil philosophies of politics. “Latini stresses,” Viroli writes, “that language is the prerequisite of the city and civil life” and that “Without language there can be no justice, no friendship, no humane community,” because with language do men “argue about what is just and unjust.”<sup>8</sup> Aristotle and Aquinas emphasize that “Nature has endowed men with speech, not mere voice. Unlike other animals, he can therefore express judgments concerning right and wrong.”<sup>9</sup> Language, therefore, possesses an integral role not only in politics but also to any communication between human beings—the phrase *human beings* (instead of human animals) being particularly relevant here because language allows for connection between minds (abstract beings). These ancient and medieval philosophers give language a central role in the formation of human communities and consciousness.

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Structures like language and reason are necessary for the possibility of intersubjectivity because such human-to-human connection must take place in the space of common forms—or non-moral lies, as Nietzsche would have it. Nietzsche writes, “language serves as a bridge between persons” because “*Not* to misunderstand each other when there is danger: people require this in order to interact with each other. In every friendship or relationship, people still put this principle to the test.”<sup>10, 11</sup> Two communing minds share a language of symbols representing the same or similar images and meanings for each, making abstract communication possible. Apart from pure physical coercion, these shared symbols are necessary for connections between people. As soon as any physical action becomes a symbol for conveying an idea, it ceases being a purely physical act and becomes part of a common language.

Prefiguring his *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche’s early essay *On Truth and Lie in the*

*Nonmoral Sense* describes a similar genealogy of language: “[B]ecause out of both necessity and boredom,” he writes, “he wants to exist socially and in herds, man needs a peace treaty and strives at least to rid his world of the crudest forms of *bellum omnium contra omnes*.”<sup>12</sup> Man without language lacks any means of connecting to another man save for as a *physical* animal, in which case all interactions are physical interactions. Violence exists as the only means of conflict resolution, hence the war of all against all. Language, as Nietzsche puts it, is the “peace treaty” that allows for communication through its channels so that violence can be avoided and man can live socially, but this innovation comes with the caveat that “‘truth’ is now fixed, that is, a uniformly valid and binding designation of things is invented, and the legislation of language likewise yields the first laws of truth.”<sup>13</sup> Once language arises as the medium for non-physical intersubjectivity, an edifice arises through which men must interface to interact with each other.

Thus, language, whether spoken or written words, logical symbols, or mathematical postulates, requires an imposition. In the case of a conversation, each individual self-imposes the common forms necessary for communication. The individual compels himself to associate a symbol with an image and meaning in his mind, and the other individual does likewise, so that both experience a common sensation with respect to the shared symbol. “As a rational being,” Nietzsche writes, man “now submits his actions to the rule of abstractions.”<sup>14</sup> To be rational at all is to submit to the abstract laws of rationality. This process establishes a common structure necessary for intersubjectivity, which is, significantly, hierarchical and imposed. If the common space of connection is language, then it is subject to the rules of grammar, syntax, vocabulary, spelling, and so on. The individual must subject himself to these external rules in order to communicate to another individual, and this second individual must do likewise. The result, as Nietzsche puts it, is “the construction of a pyramidal order of castes and degrees, creating a new world of laws, privileges, subordinates, and boundary demarcations . . . something regulatory and imperative.”<sup>15</sup> This structure of rules, then, establishes rectitude of form depending on an expression’s proximity to or distance from the rules of that structure. The greater the proximity, the more accurate and understandable are the shared forms and, therefore, the better related are the individual’s ideas. A hierarchy of expression then arises based on the common standard of the shared structure, and at the center of this structure are the common rules: grammar, postulates, or presuppositions, for example. To veer from these rules is to express oneself inferiorly and vice versa. In the case of conversation, the rules are imposed only insofar as every individual must impose adherence on himself if he desires to be understood and participate in discourse and connection with other humans.

This entire process is concisely summarized by anthropologist Stephen A. Tyler:

Our subjectivity, then, requires a world of external convention which it supposes is objective but whose objectivity is, in fact, a consequence of intersubjectivity. The poles of our understanding—its subjectivity and objectivity, immanence and transcendence—derive from that intersubjectivity manifest in the first act of genuine speech.<sup>16</sup>

Intersubjectivity requires and then creates a common structure, but which then becomes seemingly objective and, eventually, transcendent. “[E]very word becomes a concept,” Nietzsche writes; over time, men confuse the forms of his making with the things

themselves.<sup>17</sup> The structure, in other words, becomes the truth—transcendent and universal.

The necessity of such a hierarchical and imposed structure for human connection becomes more pronounced in the case of bringing together a community. A community has particular customs and traditions, and the ruler uses these forms to establish rules that allow the community to form a unity through common subjection to them, creating a particularistic order. The name for this collection of the community's rules is justice. Unlike the mere conversational version of this dynamic, wherein individuals impose shared rules upon themselves in order to communicate to one another, in politics, the ruler imposes the common rules. The dynamic has not changed; only its manifestation has. In the linguistic case, imposition adheres to a common structure, but institutes of language do not violently impose their rule upon dissident writers; rather, dissidents are ostracized by the community for failing to conform, or they are ignored because their refusal to conform makes them difficult to understand. Politics, however, because it pertains not only to rules of communication but also to rules of behavior, must confront behavior on the behavioral plane: action. The ruler—aptly named because he personifies the rules' *becoming*—uses force to impose the order necessary not only for the efficiency or justice of the community, but for the community to exist at all. The community, in other words, does not pre-exist and then require an imposition of justice; the imposition of justice creates the community, and the ruler is the actor who does so. But, like the false objectivity that arises from the rules that allow for intersubjectivity, the rules of the community, bound together in the conception of justice, over time take on the characteristic of transcendence. Thus, Plotinus and St. Augustine see in political order a relatedness to a higher, divine order.

What Viroli subsequently recounts as the transition from civil philosophy to reason of state (political science in the Machiavellian tradition) is the history of the ascent of an error—that error being a false divorce between private morality and public political justice. According to Batista Guarini, “Since politics is the architectural discipline *par excellence*, it must be regarded as superior to rhetoric.”<sup>18</sup> But this statement does not fully take into account the interdependence of politics and rhetoric. As noted above, the origin of the community is language because it serves as the first common standard by which the community unites according to shared rules. The ruler has to bring an order to the community rooted in its customs, and what could be a more prime custom than language itself? The ruler, therefore, has to contend with the common structures already present by virtue of language, and thus, has to use rhetoric in the practice of politics. Power relies on rhetoric and language, which empowers a particular form of language; the two are, thus, inexorably intertwined in a process of justice *becoming*. The ruler imposes justice, common rules shared by the community, but his very ascent depends on his utilization of the common rules of language and rhetoric.

Post-Machiavellian political science correctly holds that “What really counts is practice (*uso*), rather than knowledge of any universal rules,” because the apparently universal rules actually derive from the practice of politics.<sup>19</sup> But this conception is mistaken in determining that “Once identified with the art of preserving a man or group's power, politics was no longer regarded as the noblest of all practical sciences,” and when Lottini writes that “the prince must not hesitate to resort also to the rules of the art of the state, no matter if they are repugnant to the principles of justice.”<sup>20, 21</sup> This thinking establishes a false dichotomy between justice and the supposedly unjust practice



of politics, whose goal is the preservation of the power of the state because the practice of politics creates the order that allows for justice in the first place. A ruler cannot violate the rules of justice if his doing so preserves his power and, therefore, the power of the state to maintain the order that makes justice possible. Violations of justice on the part of the ruler are paradoxical because they are ultimately actions in the service of establishing justice. Bernardo Segni makes this false distinction when he argues that subjects “no longer had the opportunity to participate in political life,” and rulers “just needed the art of the state.”<sup>22</sup> He overlooks the fact that subjects still participate in political life insofar as their membership in the community depends upon their adherence to common rules, which are enforced by the ruler, integrating ruler and ruled into a unified political life, not separating them into a private sphere and reason of state. Viroli notes that the product of this evolution from civil philosophy to reason of state carried with it the notion of a “new political man,” who “is not supposed to rule for the good of his subjects, but for his own.”<sup>23</sup> But in pursuing his own good, a ruler must necessarily take into account the good of his subjects, lest his cruelty ultimately bring about his own demise. Hence the notion of good measure, present in both civil philosophy—John of Viterbo’s advice that “rulers must always maintain the right measure, according to the time and the circumstances, without exceeding the appropriate terms”—and in the idea of reason of state—Cosimo de’ Medici’s practice wherein “the prince . . . should use a severe justice (*severa giustitia*) with culprits, and clemency with the rest.”<sup>24, 25</sup> The fundamentals of civil philosophy remain in one way or another in the theory of reason of state, but the latter falsely divides politics and justice and is, therefore, a confusion and not a genuine transformation.

Benedict Anderson likewise notes the importance of language and transcendence in creating communities. He writes, “All the great classical communities conceived of themselves as cosmically central, through the medium of a sacred language linked to a superterrestrial order of power.”<sup>26</sup> Here again a language-based order derives from power and takes on the characteristic of transcendence. “[O]ntological reality,” he adds, “is apprehensible only through a single, privileged system of re-presentation: the truth-language.”<sup>27</sup> Language brings the community together through its shared forms, relaying a common notion of truth, but this process depends upon the power of the privileged system, as he calls it. Power and its imposed forms are, then, necessary to the existence of the community. Anderson here echoes the thinking of the civil philosophy outlined in Viroli. “The fundamental conceptions about ‘social group,’” Anderson writes, “were centripetal and hierarchical, rather than boundary-oriented and horizontal” with “Kingship organiz[ing] everything around a high centre.”<sup>28, 29</sup> Anderson contrasts this hierarchical power structure with the later idea of the nation, “imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”<sup>30</sup>

But, as noted above, horizontal community requires the vertical structure of an imposed higher standard in order for the community to possess a unified form. Anderson is then correct in saying that the nation is “*imagined*,” and in disagreeing with Gellner’s contention that this imagining is “fabrication” rather than “creation,” but he does not fully recognize the necessity of vertical structure for the existence of the nation’s horizontal community.<sup>31</sup> Nations, therefore, are not different from classical, sacred-language-based civilizations in their underlying structure but only in scope and manifestation. The community is imaged as a territorially-demarcated community of

peers, but still requires a vertical power structure to impose the common language, now including national myths, festivals, events, and so on, so that the community can exist at all. This process of imposition does not mean that the entire nation is nothing but a cynical imposition by and for power. As recognized by the civil philosophers, power must contend with existing customs. Traditions, myths, and the like naturally arise, and power standardizes these forms into a higher standard, shaping a community into existence. In Nietzschean parlance, the nation becomes what it is. He describes the relationship between language and community:

Using the same words is not enough to get people to understand each other: they have to use the same words for the same species of inner experiences . . . This is why a people in a community will understand each other better than they understand people belonging to other groups, even when they all use the same language. Or rather, when individuals have lived together for a long time under similar conditions . . . , there *arises* something that “understands itself”—a people.<sup>32</sup>

Language’s vertical structure contains forms that generate the same sensation in different individuals so that these individuals can interface through this structure and convey meanings to each other. A community then arises from the language, consisting of the collection of individuals whom the forms of that particular language affect by rousing in them the same sensations. This community of self-understanding is what Nietzsche calls “a people,” the origin of “the nation,” illustrating the need for a vertical structure (language) for the existence of a horizontal community (the people).

The same process by which language creates a people also gives rise to language itself: communicative symbols naturally arise, but over time authorities standardize these symbols into a higher standard: formal language. Language is never nefariously invented by the machinations of power; the standardization of formal language takes what arose organically and then clarifies common rules. Even the notion of *self* requires a similar process: a component of consciousness has to impose a standard on the totality of impulses, desires, and actions to separate the *who-I-am* from the *who-I-am-not*. Nietzsche touches upon this process in the *Genealogy*, specifically in describing how the notion of the “subject” itself is born. The slaves of his master-slave dichotomy invent the notion of the “subject” so that the actions of the masters become freely willed “*deeds*,” which allows the slaves to hold the masters responsible.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, however, the slaves themselves are subjected to this standard. The very process through which the slaves invent the “subject” is that by which they become subjects themselves and, then, become *subjected* to a seemingly external standard, which subsequently, as noted above, takes on the characteristic of transcendence. This process is not only the genealogy of morality but also the genealogy of language and the state. Like the latter two, the concept of the “subject” initially arises organically: the need to believe “in an unbiased ‘subject’ with freedom of choice” arises from “an instinct of self-preservation” and facilitates “that sublime self-deception” of “the majority of the dying, the weak and the oppressed.”<sup>34</sup> Like language, the concept of the “subject” arises to serve an evolutionary need, and from this, a power—in this case, the rational faculty—erects a standard that defines the parameters of the *self*. In this case, the standard not only limits the scope of action or expression but also the scope of the *self*, defining it as the “subject,” or the freely willing agent and, therefore, excluding instincts, compulsions, and the entire physical presence from selfhood. Thus, accidents are not products of the *self*.

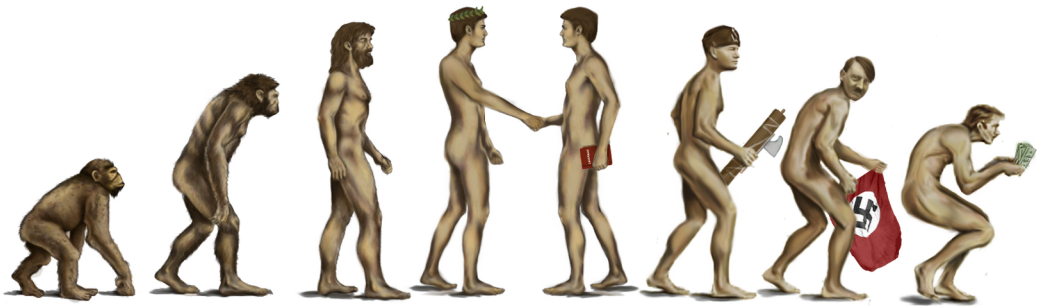
Nietzsche also notes how this creation of the *self* is not independently created but intertwined in its formation with the community. “[C]onscious thinking,” he says\*, “*takes place in words, that is, in communication symbols*”; and this fact discloses the origin of consciousness.”<sup>35</sup> Nietzsche places the origin of consciousness in language and the origin of rational man in submission to abstract concepts, which themselves derive from language. Because language arises for the purpose of social living, the *self* arises in the realm of intersubjectivity, not independently or internally. Nietzsche writes, therefore, “consciousness actually belongs not to man’s existence as an individual but rather to the community and herd-aspects of his nature.”<sup>36</sup> Through social interaction with others does the vertical structure of intersubjectivity arise (language, reason, etc.), and through these forms, rational consciousness comes into being and defines a notion of *self* in relation and opposition to the common framework, creating the notion of the “internal,” despite this internality relying on the structures of communal intersubjectivity. Without socialization, there would be no *self*, at least in the human sense of a thinking mind.



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Nietzsche describes how the *self* arises through the “breeding [of] an animal with the prerogative to promise” and makes “man to a certain degree necessary, uniform, a peer amongst peers, orderly and consequently predictable.”<sup>37</sup> The unnatural, constant *self* arises out of the natural process of breeding, again illustrating the process by which the vertical structure that defines a *thing* arises from an evolutionary process rooted in the substance that the vertical structure comes to shape through its imposition of rule—the *thing becoming itself*. This process is similar to Benedict Anderson’s description of the origin of the national idea: “The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, . . . solid community moving steadily down (or up) history.”<sup>38</sup> The use of the word “organism” emphasizes the comparison. The nation comes into being like the *self* and like all *things*. The nation-state, therefore, cannot be separated into the nation (the people) and the state (the structures governing those people) because the imposition of a state’s authority creates a national idea among the population who share the common structures of its rule, and the beginning of a national idea creates a will-to-state, an authority to formalize the structures that constitute the nation. The state does not create the people out of nothing, but the people as such do not pre-exist the authority that creates them. For example and more at home for Nietzsche, the conception of the German nation simultaneously gave birth to an idea of Germanness and, therefore, to a standard by which something was German or not. And so, because a standard by its nature requires an authority to establish and impose it, the birth of the will to a German nation was also the birth of the idea of the German state, the vertical structure that would bring into being the horizontal community of the nation. Things, therefore, do not exist to be subsequently subjected; things become through subjection—quite literally, the creation of the subject.

The self, language, the state, and religion all share the same underlying process of becoming. Nietzsche contends that “instructions from *above*” are the concept in which “divine and human government are usually fused.”<sup>39</sup> “The power,” he adds\*, “that lies in unity of popular sentiment, in the fact that everyone holds the same opinions and has



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the same objective, is sealed and protected by religion.”<sup>40</sup> The power of a vertical structure is strengthened and safeguarded by the transcendence of religion—whether the Catholic church of medieval Christendom or the German myth and folklore revitalized by nineteenth century German nationalism—but this power relationship is precisely what is undone by democracy. Nietzsche argues that in democracy, government “is regarded as nothing but the instrument of the popular will, not as an Above in relation to a Below but merely as a function of the sole sovereign power, the people.”<sup>41</sup> With respect to the nineteenth century nation-state, the transformation of the vertical structure (the state) into popular sovereignty means also the disintegration of the national community to which it gives form. In other words, “the sovereignty of the people serves then to banish the last remnant of magic and superstition from this realm of feeling,” bringing about the “*decay of the state*.”<sup>42</sup> This decay has two stages, which Nietzsche proceeds to describe.

The first stage grows out of the privatization of religion, which takes away transcendent legitimacy from the state and poses the first crisis. “The first consequence of this,” Nietzsche writes, “will be an apparent strengthening of religious feeling.”<sup>43</sup> Nietzsche, notably, does not limit this phenomenon to religion proper but speaks more broadly of religious feeling, by which he means the privatization of the moral component of the state. As discussed above, the state brings justice into being through its imposition of the rules of justice. With the privatization of the religious feeling, transcendent conceptions of justice also become private and, eventually take the form of ideologies. These ideologies become vertical structures of their own, forming and shaping new horizontal groups that stand outside of and in opposition to the state. The tenets of these ideologies will arise organically like those of the state-community that they grow

to oppose. The necessities or interests of groups (a social class, etc.) are standardized into group ideologies that then establish what ought to be the characteristics and interests of its respective group. Thus, just as with the political community, with language, and with the self, these ideologies become what they are.

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These ideologies' opposition to the state will arouse "an almost fanatical enthusiasm for the state . . . aided by the fact that, since their sundering from religion, hearts in these circles have felt a sense of emptiness, which they are seeking provisionally to fill with a kind of substitute in the form of devotion to the state."<sup>44</sup> In effect, the state becomes its own ideology, arising from its need to preserve itself in the face of the new ideological competition. In other words, the state becomes increasingly authoritarian and develops its own pro-state ideology. The anti-state ideologies become increasingly violent against the state because violence was rendered unjust by virtue of the common justice of the state. But the disintegration of the commonality of that justice wrought by the decay of the state means that there is no longer a shared standard of justice between the different ideologies and between the ideologies and the state. In fact, violence becomes just within the context of the ideology because it allows that ideology's conception of the right (justice) to come to power. Such a society will cease to be a unified community, lacking any shared core.

This first phase of Nietzsche's prediction unfolded in first half of the twentieth century. The transcendent power of the state dissipated and the two ideologies that defined the era, Communism and National Socialism, were totalitarian. Vertical structures limit everything except themselves. Within the state model, ideologies are limited by the supremacy of the state, but the state is only limited by itself. In other words, the state is only limited by its structure—separation of powers, elections, parliamentary coalition building, and so forth. A vertical structure can only be limited by the internal form of that structure. Because the new anti-state ideologies comprise their own vertical structures, they are not limited by the traditional rules of the state and are, therefore, totalitarian in their scope and activity. The state must then alter its structure to combat ideologies not limited by the norms of its own vertical structure, leading to the increasing centralization of power and authoritarianism of states in the early twentieth century in attempt to preserve order amid increasing political violence, and culminating in Fascism, the unfettered power of the state *as such* over society, without external ideological justification from class (Communism) or race (National Socialism).

Hannah Arendt differentiates between the totalitarian movements and Italian Fascism, wherein Mussolini "did not attempt to establish a full-fledged totalitarian regime and contented himself with dictatorship and one-party rule," similar to "nontotalitarian dictatorships . . . in prewar Rumania, Poland, the Baltic states, Hungary, Portugal and Franco Spain."<sup>45</sup> In totalitarian movements, the vertical structures' power



became unlimited because their only limitations, those of the structures' own internal contradictions, were eliminated by centralizing power in the hands of a single individual—the party leader or the Führer. The individual became the vertical structure so that the power of each ideology could be maximized in contention with the others. The state responded with the fascist dictator, who, as illustrated by Mussolini's eventual ousting, did not possess the total power of his Communist or National Socialist equivalents. The fascist, being the defender of the state, was still limited by the internal structural limitations that define the state. The fascist state was authoritarian with respect to the traditional roles of the state—law and order, political dissidents, and so on—but had much less interest in regulating the minutiae of day to day life. By contrast, when the continuity of the German state was threatened in the latter days of the Second World War, National Socialist ideology took precedent even if it forced the state to act self-destructively. When the fascist state was threatened, the Italian government removed Mussolini to preserve the institutions and functions of the state. In this respect, the failure of the assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler in July 1944 was the defeat of a fascistic tendency within the German state.

Nothing stood in the way of the force and imposition of the vertical structure of the totalitarian movement over society and beyond society through war, which inevitably followed its ascendance to power. Arendt notes that totalitarian ideologies seek to “encompass, in due course, the entire human race” because they grew out of nineteenth-century “pan-movements,” which possessed a “[h]ostility to the state as an institution.”<sup>46, 47</sup> Totalitarian ideologies were, therefore, the anti-state ideologies that resulted from the privatization of the “religious feeling,” or private claims to moral certainty; Mussolini and the other state-dictatorships to which Arendt refers exemplify “fanatical enthusiasm for the state.”<sup>48</sup> The rise of totalitarianism in the first half of the twentieth century brought to fruition the first part of Nietzsche's prediction.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas describes a process of privatization that took place in the late eighteenth century, but this was the beginning and not the totality of the privatizing process that Nietzsche describes. Habermas writes, “To the degree that they [commodity owners] were emancipated from governmental directives and controls, they made decisions freely in accord with standards of profitability.”<sup>49</sup> These owners “were subject only to the anonymous laws functioning in accord with an economic rationality immanent, so it appeared, in the market,” laws “backed up by the ideological guarantee of a notion that market exchange was just,” enabling “justice to triumph over force.”<sup>50</sup> The “autonomy of private people” was based on “the right to property.”<sup>51</sup> This *does* mark a transformation of the public sphere, to use his title, from civic-minded eighteenth century republicanism to private nineteenth century capitalism, but the latter still relies on a single, imposed vertical structure—the bourgeois state. Habermas says the transition marked what was perceived as the ascendance of justice over force, but this conception of justice was a specifically property-based, capitalist conception of justice that, ultimately, had to be enforced through the power of the state. Beneath the right to property must lie the enforcement of that right, and so the transformation was less a complete privatization than it was a shift in focus within the public sphere from civic life to private life. This new private sphere still required the public authority of the state and common ideology to enshrine it.

Habermas makes this clear in writing that what “completed the privatization of civil society” was “a market that” made “possible a matter of private people left to

themselves.”<sup>52</sup> But, like the *self*, whose existence as a rational consciousness depends upon the shared linguistic and abstract structure of the community, this private person depended upon the public justice structure of the market for the autonomy of their private life. This nineteenth century private man only possessed his “liberties” because they were “codified in the system of bourgeois civil law, [which] protected the order of the ‘free market.’”<sup>53</sup> The new private sphere depended upon the market, which in turn depended upon the law, and this law had to be enforced by the state, the public authority and, like it had always been, the protector of the community’s vertical structure, a property-based, capitalist structure in this case. Thus, the thinking of the time that the private sphere was “free from domination” and “free from any kind of coercion” was mistaken.<sup>54</sup> In fact, the private sphere *required* domination by a private-property law system and the coercion necessary to enforce that system. Without those elements, the commerce and free trade that made the private sphere possible could not exist. The supposed aim of “abolishing the state as an instrument of domination altogether” was in fact only the aim of abolishing the domination of state action contrary to the market while enshrining state action that defended the market—enforcing property law, contracts, and so on.<sup>55</sup>

Precisely this domination of capitalist interests passing themselves off as objective—having replaced the previous era’s domination of feudal interests passing themselves off as transcendent—drove Marx’s desire to stir the proletariat into a consciousness of opposition between proletarian interests and those of the bourgeoisie. This thinking marks the more profound privatization that culminated in the twentieth century, Marxist thought having developed into one of the two totalitarian ideologies described above. The distinction is that Habermas’ nineteenth-century privatization still depended upon a central vertical structure upon which the entire community was based and which the state enforced. The vertical structure had lost the overtly religious justification of the pre-Enlightenment era, but still existed as the sole, and therefore seemingly objective and external, authority. Marx, because he recognized the un-objective and interest-minded nature of that system, recognized an opposition of interests between bourgeoisie and proletariat and, therefore, labeled proletariat support for bourgeois social institutions *false consciousness*. Marxist ideology became its own vertical structure that stood in opposition to the prevailing bourgeois vertical structure and, therefore, in opposition to the state. This was the beginning of the privatization of “religious feeling” wherein Nietzsche saw the decay of the state and which eventually led to the disintegration of the traditional state in the twentieth century in the face of the totalitarian movements—the privatization of the conception of right, from public justice to ideology.<sup>56</sup>

The latter privatization is more reminiscent of Hegel’s recounting the demise of ethical life under the “Roman Realm.”<sup>57</sup> He describes how “differentiation is carried to its conclusion, and ethical life is sundered without end into the extremes of the private self-consciousness of persons on the one hand, and abstract universality on the other,” this universality being that of “private persons equal with one another” and pursuing “insatiable self-will.”<sup>58</sup> Ethical life is torn apart into each individual’s interest, which could be idealistic or hedonistic but is ultimately only the will of a single individual set against all others. The only universal is that every individual possesses a will of his own and so pursues it. Those in power eventually seek only “the maintenance of heartless self-seeking power” while the democratic element “becomes more and more corrupt

until it sinks into a rabble.”<sup>59</sup> Each individual becomes his own vertical structure, in a sense, and lacking the communal medium of intersubjectivity and social life, individuals become both solipsistic and yet empathically aware of every other individual’s solipsistic life—“universal misfortune.”<sup>60</sup> Rome would ultimately see the consequence of this transformation in the renewed barbarism of its later years and eventual dissolution.

The second part of the Nietzsche’s prediction occurred over the course of the second half of the twentieth century and continues today in this century. After the destruction wrought by totalitarianism in the 1930s and 40s, the taste for violence waned, but the fundamental nature of politics remained. In fact, the notion of various vertical structures contending for power has become the central idea of postwar pluralism. These vertical

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structures, however, no longer seek total domination because doing so would risk the total destruction of the ideology. Ideologies still compete for power but have replaced street fights, paramilitaries, and political violence with campaigns, elections, public relations strategies, and activist organizations. This mixture of a democratic battlefield with an underlying pluralism of vertical structures gave rise to pluralist democracy. But, over the last several decades, this arrangement has had Nietzsche’s predicted effects. “The individual,” Nietzsche argues\*, “will see only that side of it [the state] that promises to be useful or threatens to be harmful to him, and will bend all his efforts to acquiring influence upon it.”<sup>61</sup> The state becomes the means to pursue one’s personal interests, and the goal of politics becomes simply the contest for the reins of the state.

The persistence of the underlying essence of politics present in the totalitarian age is illustrated by Nietzsche’s description of individuals’ relationship to the law: “bowing for the moment to the force which backs up the law,” but then setting “to work to subvert it with a new force, the creation of a new majority.”<sup>62</sup> Laws are no longer the semi-transcendent rules of the state’s vertical structure; instead, they have become only the surface tools in the service of one’s own vertical structure, whether a party, ideology, or personal interest. Laws are to be tolerated only insofar as violations carry negative consequences, but are then to be steered through democratic politics and majority building in a favorable direction. The underlying elements of the totalitarian age persist in that laws and the state have lost their transcendent centrality, and that politics is a contest between differing vertical structures, but democracy has replaced violence and war. In addition, even ideological transcendence has dissipated and given way to personal interest. As a result, vertical structures themselves have become more fluid as rigid ideologies have given way to shifting public opinion, rising and falling political parties, and changing governing coalitions. Eventually, “the uselessness and destructiveness of these short-winded struggles will impel man to . . . the resolve to do away with the concept of the state, to the abolition of the distinction between private and public.”<sup>63</sup>

Nietzsche here portends the rise of neoliberalism in the last decades of the twentieth century and its pursuit of privatization. The World Health Organization defines neoliberalism as “a belief in the free market and minimum barriers to the flow of goods, services and capital,” consisting of four primary tenets: “capital account liberalization, trade liberalization, domestic liberalization, and privatization.”<sup>64</sup> In *Capital Resurgent*, Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy describe neoliberalism as abandoning “state intervention in industrial policy” in favor of “‘market’ rules.”<sup>65</sup> Foreseeing this transformation, Nietzsche predicts that “Private companies will step by step absorb the business of the state: even the most resistant remainder of what was formerly the work of government . . . will in the long run be taken care of by private contractors.”<sup>66</sup> In short, the privatization of vertical structure that democracy engenders eventually makes democracy itself dysfunctional. The state becomes just the avenue for competition between groups and individuals, who are no longer bound together by any higher sense of community. Neoliberalism transfers the structural authority that a pluralist, democratic state can no longer possess to private institutions. Market rules or economic laws become the *objective* standard of the neoliberal vertical structure. Neoliberal privatization, in other words, represents the formation of a new vertical structure outside the competition of democratic pluralism, resulting in a non-participatory authority that resembles the state of the pre-democratic era, although private institutions still have to contend (at least for now) with the democratic state and its political fluctuations.

Underlying any community, any relation between individuals, and even the notion of the *self*, are vertical structures, which establish rules and define that community, relation, or *self*. But precisely what Nietzsche recognizes both with the death of God and the decay of the state is the loss of belief in the transcendence of those vertical structures. Morality is no longer divine, the state is no longer absolute, and, by the twentieth century, even the *self* had been deconstructed by psychoanalysis. What, then, were and will be the consequences of this transformation in human consciousness? Keith Ansell-Pearson sees in this dilemma a similarity between Nietzsche and Rousseau but also two “very different solutions.”<sup>67</sup> Both see “social institutions” as a problem, but Rousseau sees them as standing “in the way of cultivating our true moral nature,” while Nietzsche holds that “the problem lies with morality itself, which stands in the way of the further advancement and cultivation of the human animal.”<sup>68</sup> Nietzsche, in essence, takes Rousseau’s argument to its ultimate conclusion. Rousseau posits a type of man who had been corrupted by society’s vertical structures and, through their rules and imposition, alienated from his natural being, which, in Rousseau’s mind, was moral.

Nietzsche recognizes morality itself as a constricting vertical structure and, therefore, Rousseau’s man of the state of nature as a contradiction. Man before the existence of any vertical structures was completely animal. According to Ansell-Pearson, Nietzsche saw this state in “the Dionysian experience,” which “symbolizes precisely that oneness with nature yearned for by Rousseau,” the “overcoming of the subject” and “a feeling of ‘mystical self-abnegation,’” which reveals man as a “species-being.”<sup>69</sup> There is oneness because without any vertical structure, there is no process of self-creation and individuation; everything exists as one natural being. But the pre-structure Dionysian was not an overcoming of the subject because the subject had not yet been constructed. Rousseau clings to civilized institutions and artificially places them in nature by seeing the “genuine liberty” of man’s redemption as arising for the individual “only as a member of a social community in which one becomes a unique moral person.”<sup>70</sup> But both

the community and the unique, individuated person rely on structures that alienate man from Rousseau's desired "state of 'universal Sameness.'"<sup>71</sup> This explains Nietzsche's belief that the Dionysian contains a "hostility to the political instinct"—the very nature of politics is the pursuit and construction of the rules and institutions that divorce man from nature.<sup>72</sup>

After man's alienation lies the potential and need for self-overcoming. And, importantly, the goal is an overcoming, not an undoing. Nietzsche does not desire the destruction of all form and structure, but the consciousness of that form and structure and the process by which it was formed and has developed. "Nietzsche," Ansell-Pearson asserts\*, "does not call for a return to nature, for 'there has never been a natural humanity...man reaches nature only after a long struggle.'"<sup>73</sup> Man cannot self-overcome by destroying the very conscious human faculties that allow for self-overcoming; he overcomes himself by gaining consciousness of himself, his evolution, the social institutions around him, and their evolution. This consciousness affords man a certain power over these notions and himself. He cannot remove himself from these structures without, in a sense, ceasing to be human; he can only direct them. The focus becomes "architectonic, political sculpture" in that man builds for himself, using his consciousness of what he was previously subjected to, "an aesthetic meaning . . . based on the creative entwining of good and evil."<sup>74</sup> Man should not destroy structure but shape it in his striving for an aesthetic of his own envisioning. Man should not return to Dionysian oneness but act with an awareness of that oneness on his Apollonian consciousness and its products.

The question remains, then: what consequence does this historic transformation in consciousness have for Europe? Stefan Elbe argues that European man's will-to-truth brings about the knowledge of the evolution and history of the will-to-truth, confronting him with the fact that the will-to-truth does not provide for the *value* of truth. After this realization, "The highest European value," for what Nietzsche terms good Europeans, "would gradually shift from being truth, to being freedom."<sup>75</sup> But by this, Nietzsche does not mean some definite collection of freedoms, arising from political liberalism or a doctrinal notion of human rights. Instead, he refers to the freedom arising from man's newfound consciousness of the vertical structures he has overcome, including those of the *self*, ideology, the state, and religion.

The destruction of vertical structures would not result in freedom but in a chaotic fluidity of vertical structure, where any verticality would be only a temporary and instinct-driven coagulation by the mob. Such change would represent a regression into animality, not self-overcoming. Rather, through consciousness of and then the shaping of these structures does man gain a *creative* freedom. The sovereign individual is not supposed to destroy the "Roman columbarium" of man's knowledge; he is supposed to understand that man built it, so that he can build consciously.<sup>76</sup> Elbe warns specifically against "articulating an overarching idea of Europe with fixed attributes," "the temptation of drawing up an ideal or identity that Europeans would then be persuaded to internalize," and erecting "new idols."<sup>77</sup> Signs of this creatively free new Europe existed at various points in the twentieth century, from modernist art to existentialist and absurdist literature to the avant-garde cinema of the 1960s: Europe not as an entity defined by some external standard but as self-defining creativity free from "the empty and life-denying aspects of the prior Christian-Platonic standards," afforded "the historic opportunity to experiment with an existence liberated from the constraints of



such past ideals.”<sup>78, 79</sup> A Europe willing to explore moral ambiguity artistically, in literature and film, whether realistically, darkly comic, or even through aesthetic camp, which seems, through its self-conscious ridiculousness, to have embraced a cosmic meaninglessness.

But would a Europe of sovereign individuals, each consciously building his own vertical structure and climbing it in his own way, be any different from the universal solipsism and empathy thereof described by Hegel as the condition of late Rome? If each man were the architect of his own world, wouldn't the very intersubjective nature of structure have been lost? Perhaps this dilemma explains why Nietzsche clung to an aristocratic elitism, wherein resides a taste of Plato's philosopher-king, but a philosopher-king who doesn't *know* the form of the good, but *creates* it; an aristocracy that would freely and consciously erect a new structure for Europe, which would then subsume the masses. Both Nietzsche and Plato, it seems, came at a time in their respective civilizations when the consciousness existed to conceive of a new kind of civilization that had never before existed, but only briefly enough to glimpse the dream before the world around them descended into the renewed barbarism of late civilization—a barbarism that arises not from animal unconsciousness, but from pervasive self-consciousness.

Perhaps, then, the utopian visions of the twentieth century—not systems unconsciously submitted to but ideas consciously conceived as new ideologies—were Europe's *Republics*. Perhaps the whole of humanity is no more than a stage in the evolution of a certain species of animal of limited duration: so that the human being has emerged from the ape, and will return to the ape, while there will be no one present to take any sort of interest in this strange comic conclusion. Just as, with the decline of Roman culture and its principal cause, the spread of Christianity, a general uglification of man prevailed within the Roman Empire, so an eventual decline of the general culture of the earth could also introduce a much greater uglification and in the end animalization of man to the point of apelikeness. Precisely because we are able to visualize this prospect we are perhaps in a position to prevent it from occurring.<sup>80</sup>

But is this bestialization at the end of a civilization really preventable or is this insight just the last spark of lucidity in a creature already condemned to senility and death?



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